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5 Interesting Tidbits about Diego Rivera

One hundred thirty-six years ago, the great Mexican painter

Diego Rivera was born in the city of Guanajuato.

In addition to their artistic value, his more than 10,000 works were also educational for the Mexican people.

What's more, Diego Rivera was a master provocateur. His leftist leanings and affiliation meant he incorporated controversial messages into his work, which displeased or upset individuals and institutions.

Do you know what such controversies were about?

Picasso's plagiarism

Diego Rivera and Pablo Picasso were friends in Paris. During that time, Diego invented a technique which he put into practice in his painting *Zapatista Landscape*.

Diego visited Picasso's studio and noticed that he had done something very similar in a painting. The Spaniard responded that he had painted it in 1906. Intrigued, Diego wiped a finger over Picasso's canvas. The paint was

fresh, and the Spaniard's infringement was evident.

Rivera left the atelier in a huff, and thus ended the two-year friendship.

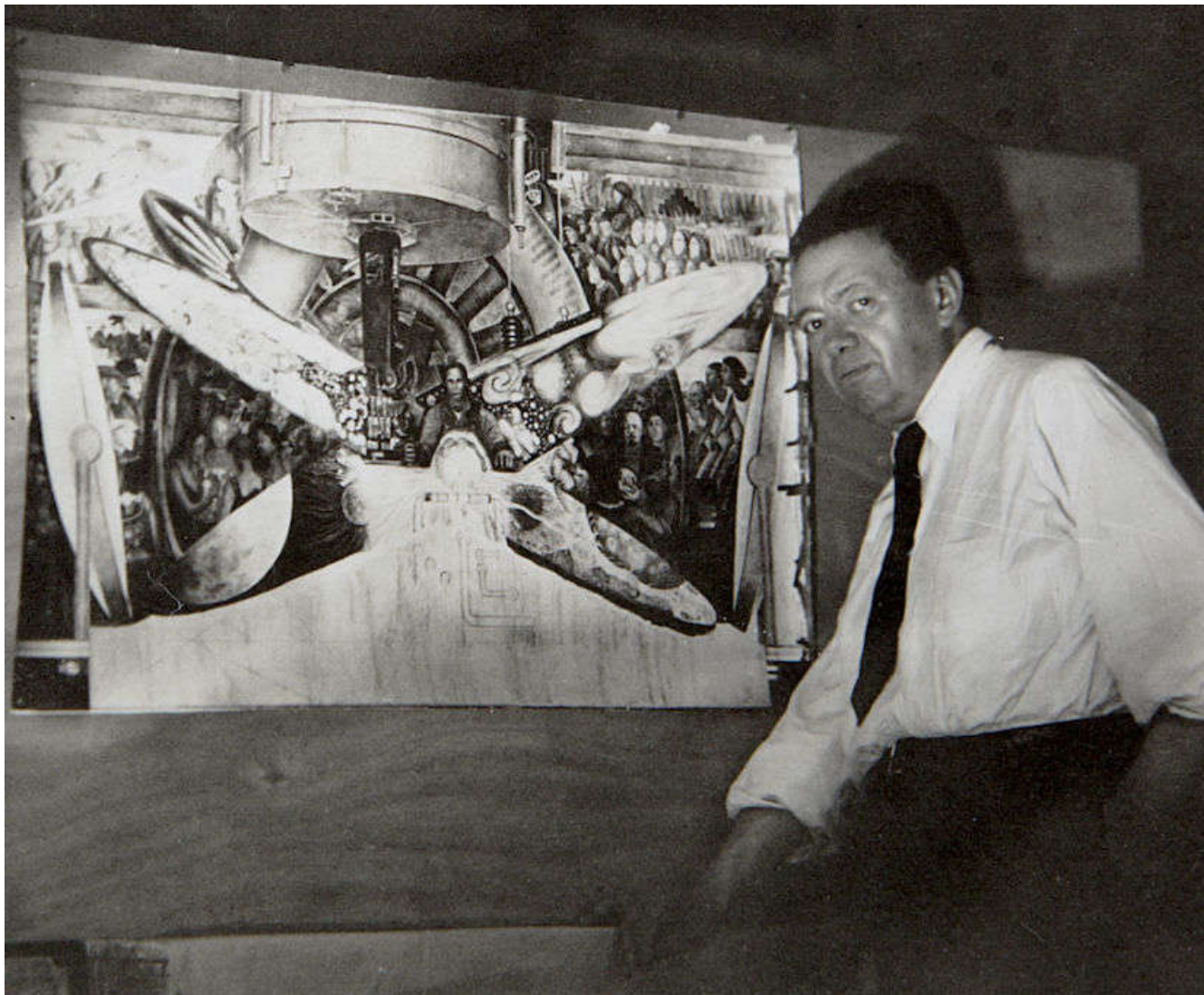


Lenin at the Rockefeller Center

In 1931, Diego Rivera was commissioned to paint a mural in the Rockefeller Center. He was paid 21,500 dollars for *Man at the Crossroads*. Rivera annoyed the Rockefellers in increments: first, he put African Americans in the composition. He then added drunken capitalists. Where his brush stroked too far was when he painted Lenin, the Russian revolutionary, on a building that would symbolize capitalism. Nelson Rockefeller sent Diego packing and destroyed the mural.

Rivera painted it again in the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City and, sure enough, one of the drunken capitalists resembles Rockefeller.





“God doesn’t exist” in Alameda Park

Dream of Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park (1948) hung in the Hotel del Prado. Rivera thought nothing of painting in Ignacio Ramírez, “el

Nigromante”, writer who in 1836 gave a speech that started with the words, “God doesn’t exist.” Diego included him with the quote and all. Shocked, the archbishop Luis María Martínez refused to bless the hotel, and a group of young conservatives damaged it. The mural had to be covered by folding screens until 1956, when Diego changed the words.

Following the 1985 earthquake, the Hotel del Prado had to be demolished. In 1988, the mural was successfully removed and installed in its current location, the Diego Rivera Mural Museum, on La Solidaridad Plaza.





Cantinflas and the Virgin of Guadalupe

In 1953, Diego did the mural *The Theater in Mexico* on the façade of Los Insurgentes Theater. He placed Cantinflas, who was at the peak of his

career, in the center. But on his coat, he also drew the Virgin of Guadalupe, as if Cantinflas were a modern-day Juan Diego.

There was so much pressure from the Church and society that Diego had to erase the Virgin. Prior to that, though, he argued: “There’s nothing contradictory between Cantinflas and the Virgin of Guadalupe, because Cantinflas is an artist who symbolizes the people of Mexico and the Virgin is their banner.”





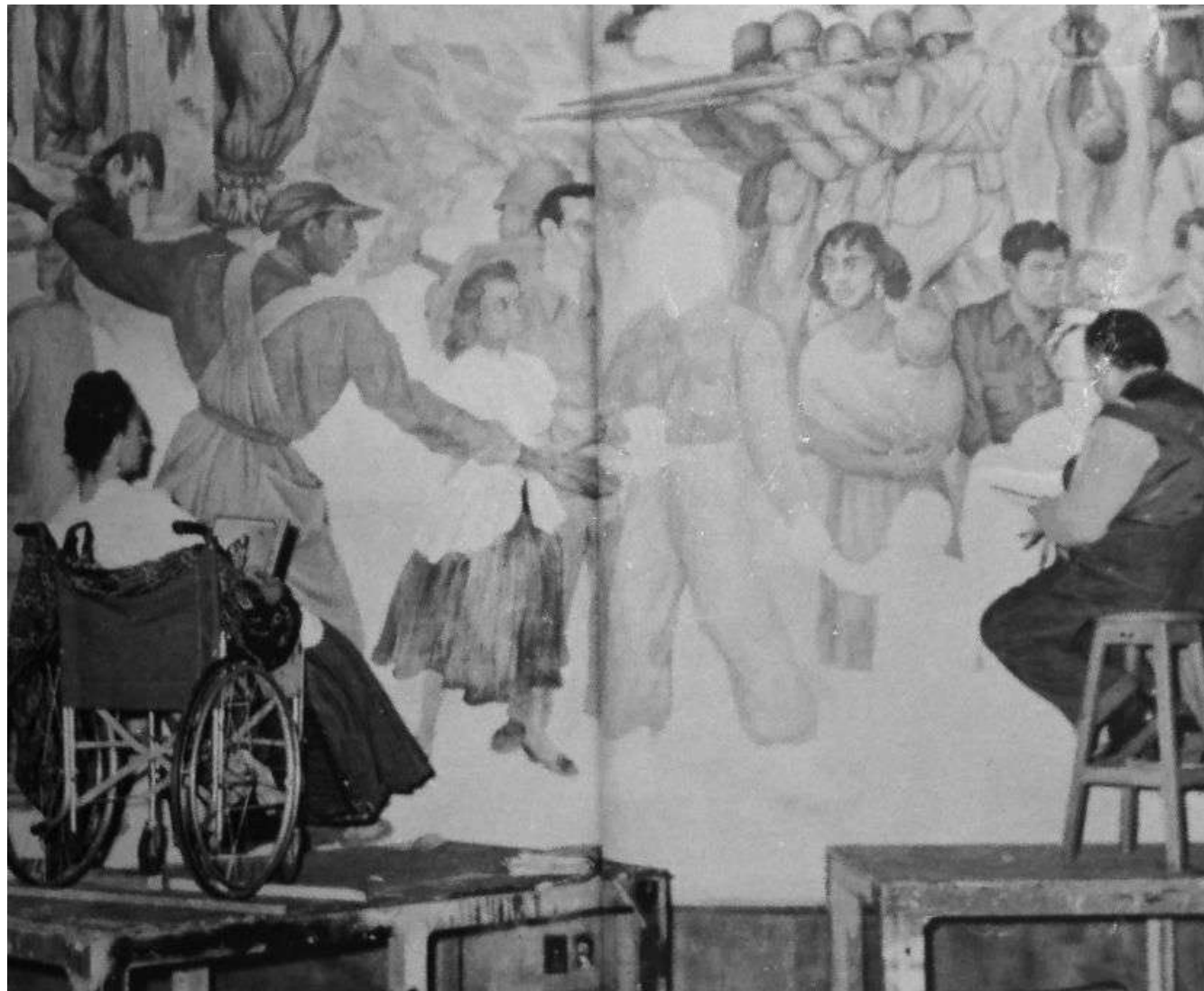
Nightmare of War, Dream of Peace, the Lost Mural

This mural, from 1952, was to be part of an exhibition that would travel to

Europe. In it, Communists Mao Tse Tung and Joseph Stalin offer peace to Uncle Sam, John Bull and Marianne, symbols of the United States, Great Britain and France. Carlos Chávez, director of the National Fine Arts Institute, INBA, didn't want to take the mural to Europe, as he considered it offensive. He didn't even let it be exhibited in the Fine Arts Palace. Fed up, Diego sold the work to the government of China, but the piece never made it to its destination. The mural left on July 30, 1953, and every trace of it was lost.

Some claim it could have been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in China; others think it is in storage at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow; there are also believers in the theory that the painting is still in Mexico, with some unknown caretaker. In 2007, sketches of the mural were exhibited, and if it were to be found, it would be among the painter's most powerful pieces.





Despite the polemics, or perhaps because of them, as a painter, Diego Rivera is still very current. Some proof: in 2012, when his work was shown at the MoMA in New York, it coincided with the firing of several workers

from Sotheby's auction house. The workers protested with placards displaying the Mexican painter's face and the phrase: "Diego is for all workers."



Several styles and scandals later,

**Diego Rivera was still a valid leader
for the workers of the world.**



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